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ABSTRACT

A mailed questionnaire was utilized to survey social service agency personnel in the Rockford, Illinois area about their interest in and need for a first year Master of Social Work extension program. The questionnaire was sent to social service agency personnel holding at least a bachelor's degree and performing or administering social services; the individuals were identified through agency liaison persons. Total response was 196 of 244, or 80 percent. The findings of the needs assessment research, contained in the brief document, offer apparent evidence of the need to develop a first year graduate program for the area. The findings clearly indicate that the personnel surveyed would participate in such a program. They are appropriately qualified in terms of professional experience and grade point averages. Their preference is to take evening courses; a majority, in fact, would enroll in two courses per quarter. On the whole, they would finance this education by themselves. The findings were submitted to the Jane Addams School of Social Work at Chicago Circle Campus (University of Illinois) with intentions of continuing the effort toward program delivery. (Author/AJ)

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A SURVEY OF STUDENT INTEREST IN A FIRST YEAR MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM FOR THE GREATER ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS AREA

Conducted by:

University of Illinois

Regional Office

Continuing Education and Public Service

Dixon, Illinois

Final Report

October, 1975

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Introduction

According to the Eighth Annual Report of the National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education, the major challenge confronting the field of social work today is "to provide for the educational and training needs of a manpower base whose responsibilities are being assumed by non-professionals and paraprofessionals." In this report, mention was made of the many "unqualified" individuals who have assumed social work positions without having professional training.

The Council on Social Work Education, the accrediting arm of the profession, interprets professionalism as those in social service roles who have completed the Bachelor's of Social Work, the first practice degree, or the Master's of Social Work, the two year graduate degree. The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics lists only 185,000 professionally trained social workers nationwide. (This represents a small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of persons employed in social work roles.)

This nationwide need of social work education has been further pinpointed in Rockford, Illinois, a metropolitan city with the largest population in the state of Illinois excepting Chicago. In the past five to ten years, key social service agency persons have been successful in arranging

for both undergraduate and graduate extension courses in social work. These courses have been offered by the Jane Addams School of Social Work at the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus. Course work has been primarily aimed at the practicing social worker, focusing on upgrading job performance skills. Sporadic efforts have been made in the past to offer degree sequences; but to the dismay of local participants a total program involving research, scholarship, internship and course work has not been implemented.

An ad hoc committee was established in the spring of 1975 to investigate the possibility of such a program. The committee members sought to verify the suspected interest and need for this degree program through an intensive assessment of potential students. Efforts were made to include the appropriate members of the Jane Addams School of Social Work in all of the planning stages, to insure healthy communications, and to solicit their respective insights into the total planning process.

The committee members with their affiliation follow:

Mr. S. Gregory Bowes, Regional Program Director, University of Illinois Regional Office, Continuing Education and Public Service, Dixon, Illinois

Dr. Ronald Hallstrom, Executive Director, Rockford Regional Academic Center, Rockford, Illinois

Mr. Tony Ingle, Alcoholism Treatment Unit, Singer Zone Center, Rockford, Illinois

Mr. Ronald Nelson, Alcoholism Treatment Unit, Singer Zone Center, Rockford, Illinois

The committee received special planning assistance from:

Dr. Robert L. Bender, Director of Statewide Programming, University of Illinois

Dr. Tunis Dekker, Director of Extension, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle

Dr. Sidney Zimbalist, Acting Director, The Jane Addams School of Social Work at Chicago Circle Campus

Mrs. Freida H. Engel, Coordinator of Continuing Education Programs, The Jane Addams School of Social Work at Chicago Circle Campus

Dr. Edward Lakner, Assistant Professor, Survey Research Laboratory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Research Design

A mailed questionnaire was utilized to survey social service agency personnel about their interest and need in a first year Master of Social Work Program. The questionnaire was developed by the ad hoc committee members and other planners, particularly Dr. Lakner. The authenticity and validity of the total needs assessment project was enhanced by the participation of the University of Illinois' Survey Research Laboratory.

As was stated earlier, direct input from the Jane Addams School of Social Work was solicited. Concrete suggestions and revisions were made; the result being a questionnaire satisfactorily designed to provide specific answers to questions about student backgrounds, capabilities, interests and need for a first year Master of Social Work Program.

opulation and Instrumentation

The questionnaire was sent to social service agency personnel holding at least a bachelor's degree and performing said services directly or administering such services. These qualified individuals were identified through contact with agency liaison persons. The specific agencies represent the total listings found in social service directories, community organization directories, and telephone listings. The Greater Rockford Area yielded most of the respondents, but significant responses came from the following cities:

Freeport
Dixon
Sterling
DeKalb
Elgin
Belvidere
} Illinois

Beloit, Wisconsin

(All communities used were approximately one hour driving time from Rockford.)

The questionnaire was completed in June, 1975. It was sent in late June to a randomly selected pretest group. These respondents had no difficulty interpreting the specific questions; hence, no refinements were made prior to the complete mailing.

This mailing was done in mid July. Of the 244 questionnaires mailed, 120 were returned by early August. A follow-up letter and additional

questionnaire was sent in late July. There were seventy-six additional returns. Total response was 196 of 244 or eighty percent. Only 48 persons were nonrespondents. No additional follow-up was done on that group.

The data was categorized according to response to specific questions. The method of analysis consists of raw data scores, percentage scores, and limited items yielding free responses.

Principal Findings

The following questions were asked those surveyed. Included with each question is a raw score response and, where appropriate, an equivalent percentage. Because not all respondents answered every question, some total figures differ slightly. (196 total respondents)

*How many years of paid professional services do you have in the field of social services?

	raw score	percent
Less than 1 year	23	11.6
1-2 years	46	23.2
3-4 years	52	26.2
5-6 years	33	16.6
More than 6 years	44	22.2

*What kind of duties have you performed? (Some responded to more than one.)

Clinical	98	50.0
Casework	171	87.2
Supervisory	90	45.9
Research	23	11.7

*Have you ever taken extension courses in social work?

Yes	88	44.8
No	108	55.2

*How many courses have you taken?

1-2 courses	58	65.9
3-4 courses	21	23.8
More than 4	9	10.3

*Were these courses taught by the University of Illinois?

Yes	47	52.2
No	43	47.8

*How interested are you in taking courses which would fulfill requirements for the First Year MSW Degree?

Very interested	132	66.6
Somewhat interested	50	25.2
Not very interested	4	2.0
Not at all interested	12	6.0

*If the University of Illinois were to offer a First Year MSW Program in 1976, how likely would you be to enroll?

Very likely	108	60.0
Somewhat likely	57	31.6
Not very likely	12	6.6
Not at all likely	3	1.6

*How many courses do you think you would take each quarter?

1 course	59	33.1
2 courses	99	55.6
More than 2	20	11.2

*Given the choice of morning, afternoon or evening courses, which would you <u>most</u> prefer?

Morning	19	10.3
Afternoon	34	18.4
Evening	131	71.2

*Would you be able to arrange for the Second Year of study in residence at Chicago?

Yes	64	49.0
No	67	51.0

*Would your employer grant you released time for educational activities at the following times?

Morning:	Yes	55	Afternoon:	Yes	82
	No	66		No	61

*How would this education be financed?

Yourself		71.1
Employer		19.8
Other	20	9.0

*What was your grade point average for the last sixty hours of credit? (Where A=5.0, B=4.0, etc.)

5.0 -4.5	27	14.2
4.49-4.0	101	53.1
3.99-3.75	43	22.6
3.75 and below	19	10.0

*What is your sex?

Female	111	57.8
Male	81	42.2

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this needs assessment research clearly indicate that the practicing social work personnel surveyed would participate in the proposed First Year Master of Social Work Degree Program. They are appropriately qualified in terms of professional experience and grade point averages. Their preference is to take evening courses; a majority, in fact, would enroll in two courses per quarter. On the whole, they would finance this education by themselves. It should be noted that these results are based on a very high (80%) respondent rate and thus deserve appropriate credence.

The findings contained herein offer apparent evidence of the need to develop a First Year Master of Social Work Program for the Greater Rockford Area. They are submitted to The Jane Addams School of Social Work at Chicago Circle Campus with intentions of continuing the effort toward program delivery. The committee members recognize that budget limitations and faculty overload offer significant obstacles to development of new programs. However, the University of Illinois, as the leading graduate institution in the State, has a distinct mission to provide continuing professional education opportunities to its respective constituencies. By implementing this program, the University of Illinois and The Jane Addams School of Social Work can not only improve their commitment to students but can enhance their image statewide.